



Nullis Certe Verbis

On The Need For Civil Sovereignty

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

January 19, 1860

To the Venerable Brothers, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops and other Ordinaries Keeping Favor and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Greetings and the Apostolic Blessing.

We cannot express in words what a consolation and what a joy to Us, in the midst of the greatest unpleasantness, are your admirable loyalty and respect, and that of your faithful, for Us and this Apostolic See, We are referring to your truly outstanding unanimity, willingness, zeal, and constancy in defending the rights of this same See and the claims of justice. From Our encyclical of last June 18 and then from Our two allocutions in Consistory, you learned of the evils oppressing civil and sacred affairs in Italy and the attempts against the legitimate Princes of Italy and the holy and legitimate dominion which belongs to Us and this Holy See. In compliance with Our wishes, you immediately ordered public prayers in your dioceses.

2. Afterwards, in kind letters sent to Us and by pastoral letters of other religious and learned writings, you vehemently denounced the sacrilegious attacks made on the civil power of the Roman Church. And defending constantly this dominion, you proclaimed and taught that God gave the civil power to the Roman Pontiff, so that he, never subject to any power, might exercise in full liberty and without any impediment the supreme task of the apostolic ministry divinely committed to him by Christ our Lord.

3. Moreover, Our beloved sons of the Catholic Church, imbued with your teaching and aroused by your example, have striven valiantly and still strive to make the same sentiments known to Us. For from every region of the whole Catholic world, We have received practically innumerable letters from ecclesiastics and laity alike of every dignity, rank, grade, and condition. These are signed by hundreds of thousands of Catholics, in which they declare their filial devotion toward Us and this Chair of Peter. They vehemently oppose the revolution and the attacks made

in some of Our provinces. They maintain that the patrimony of blessed Peter ought to be preserved completely intact and inviolate and should be defended from all injury. Some of them have, in addition, asserted this wisely in suitable printed works.

4. These outstanding expressions have so moved Us that We could not forbear to gladly proclaim, "Blessed be God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of all consolation, who consoles Us in all our tribulation." For nothing in the midst of the gravest straits in which We are oppressed, could be more welcome and more pleasing than to behold your zeal and that of the faithful for the protection of the rights of this Holy See. And you yourselves can easily understand how strongly Our paternal benevolence towards you and these Catholics grows deservedly by the day.

5. Now, however, a new cause of sorrow has arisen from a different source. And so We write to you to make Our sentiments well known. Recently, as many of you know, in a Paris newspaper called Le. Moniteur, a letter of the Emperor of the French was published replying to Our letter. In it, We asked that he, by his most powerful patronage in the Congress at Paris, defend the integral and inviolate nature of the temporal power belonging to us and the Holy See, and that he be willing to safeguard it from evil rebellion. In his letter the great Emperor, recalling his somewhat earlier proposal to Us concerning rebellious provinces of Our papal states, advises that We should of Our own accord surrender the possession of these same provinces, since it seems to him to be the only way to amend the present disorder.

6. You all know that We could not keep silence at the receipt of such a letter. Therefore, without delay, We responded to the same Emperor, declaring freely and openly that We could in no way assent to his counsel. We said that "it offers insuperable difficulties, in consideration of Our dignity and that of the Holy See and Our sacred character and the rights of the same Holy See, which pertain not to the succession of any royal family but to all Catholics." Likewise We professed "what is not Ours cannot be given up by Us, and We plainly understand that the victory he wishes to be conceded to the traitors of Emilia, would be a stimulus for future internal and external disturbers of other provinces to perpetrate the same things, when they saw the prosperous fortune of the rebels."

7. And, among other things, We informed the same Emperor, that "We could not abdicate the provinces in Emilia without violating solemn oaths by which We are bound, without exciting quarrels and disturbances in the rest of Our provinces, without committing injustice to all Catholics, and without, finally, weakening the rights not only of the Princes of Italy but of all Princes of the whole Christian world who could not watch with indifference the introduction of most destructive principles." Nor did We omit to point out that "his majesty could scarcely ignore by what men and by what money and resources the recent attempts at rebellion in Bologna, Ravenna, and elsewhere were inflamed and carried out, while the far

greater part of the population showed itself in no way induced to support these movements, something it little expected. It was, in fact, amazed."

8. And since the Emperor felt that We ought to give up these provinces because of the rebellions stirred up in them, We replied appropriately that an argument of this kind, in as much as it proved excessive, has no validity. Similar rebellions have often occurred in Europe and other areas, yet anyone can see that a legitimate argument cannot be deduced from that fact to diminish civil sovereignty. We reminded the Emperor that his first letter, sent to Us before the Italian war, which offered Us consolation, not affliction, differed from his most recent ones.

9. From certain words in his newspaper letter, We gathered that there were grounds for fear that the above cited provinces of Ours in Emilia were already considered as if they had been taken away from Our dominion. We, accordingly, begged him in the name of the Church, that for his own Majesty's good and utility as well, to vanquish this fear. We reminded him that all must give an exact account at some time before the tribunal of Christ and undergo a most severe judgment; therefore each one must take care that he experience the effect of mercy rather than justice.

10. These are the chief matters, among others, that We replied to the Emperor of France. We judged they should be made known to you that you and the universal Catholic world recognize that We will without fear leave nothing untried in fighting bravely for the cause of religion and for preserving the civil dominion of the Roman Church and its temporal possessions and rights. Intact and inviolate these pertain to the entire Catholic world, and We look to the just cause of other Princes.

11. And supported by the divine aid of Him who said "you will have tribulation in the world, but be confident, I have overcome the world" (an 16.33) and "blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice sake" (Mt 5.10), We are prepared to follow the illustrious footsteps of Our Predecessors, to emulate their example and to suffer harsh hard things and even lay down Our life, before deserting the cause of God, the Church, and justice in any way. But you can easily conjecture with what bitter sorrow We are affected, seeing the dreadful war which harasses our religion to the greatest detriment of souls and seeing the great whirlwinds which toss about the Church and this Holy See. And you can also easily understand our disquietude at the great danger for souls in these disturbed provinces, where piety, religion, faith, integrity, and morals are weakened daily especially from the pernicious writings published there.

12. Do you, therefore, defend this cause and inflame more and more daily the faithful entrusted to your care so that under your leadership they do not cease either defending the Catholic Church and this Holy See or protecting the civil dominion of the same See and the patrimony of St. Peter. Together with your faithful pray that God may command the winds and the water and come to the benefit of Us and His Church. Pray also that He may enlighten enemies to bring

them back to the paths of truth, justice, and salvation.

13. And so that God may incline His ear to Our prayers and yours and those of all the faithful, We ask first the recommendation of the Virgin Mary, who is our most beloved mother and most trustworthy hope and ever present guardian of the Church. Nothing is more powerful with God than her patronage. We also implore the support of Peter, then of his co-apostle Paul, and of all the heavenly citizens who reign with Christ in heaven. We do not doubt that in the light of your outstanding religion and priestly zeal, you will obey these Our prayers and petitions. Meanwhile as a pledge of Our burning charity toward you, from Our deepest heart and with a wish for all every true happiness, We lovingly impart Our Apostolic Blessing to you yourselves and all the clergy, and faithful laity committed to each of your vigilance.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 19 January 1860, in the 14th year of Our pontificate.